United Nations

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ United Nations Headquarters in Kigali hit by 12 shells as fighting in Rwandan capital intensifies; prospective contributors to UNAMIR meet in New York.

+ Secretary-General says Transitional Government could soon resolve Liberian conflict if new Foreign Minister is inducted as scheduled today; notes progress in implementing Cotonou Agreement.

+ Secretary-General welcomes Malawi's first multiparty elections, citing hope for democracy and economic growth.

+ Member States owe United Nations $2.98 billion as of 15 May; $990 million owed to regular budget and $1.99 billion to peace-keeping.

+ Assistant Secretary-General Sanbar says DPI will work to make development issues more attrative to media; solid information programme on peace-keeping operations would counter unrealistic expectations.

+ Second United Nations Conference on Disarmament to be opened by Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs in Hiroshima on 24 May.

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The United Nations Headquarters in Kigali was hit today by around 12 shells as fighting in the Rwandan capital intensified, according to a spokesman for the Organization. It was not known whether the facility had been deliberately targeted. Meanwhile, heavy fighting around the airport resulted in the suspension of flights by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR).

The spokesman announced that a meeting of prospective contributors to UNAMIR would be held in New York today. He said some 42 states had been invited to attend that meeting, but stressed that the recent appeal for contributions of troops and equipment had been universal.

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For information media—not an official record

If the new Foreign Minister of Liberia is inducted as scheduled today, the National Transitional Government might soon resolve the country's tragic conflict, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has told the Security Council. In a report dated 18 May, he noted that the Council of State had been installed -- as required by the Cotonou Agreement and Security Council resolution 911 (1994) -- and the Transitional Government had held its first cabinet meeting on 13 May. He praised the Liberian parties, as well as the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and the Military Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for those achievements.

The Secretary-General said a team of international experts would visit Liberia next week to consult with the Government and the Election Commission. The team will discuss various aspects of United Nations assistance in the country's forthcoming elections. It will also review Liberia's Constitution and advise on how to increase public awareness of the electoral process. The Secretary-General stressed that much still needed to be done in the areas of disarmament and demobilization, and called on the international community to support Liberia in its efforts to implement the Cotonou Agreement.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today welcomed the first multiparty elections held in Malawi since independence in 1964, and expressed the hope that they would open the way to democracy and economic growth. He congratulated the people of Malawi on the manner in which the elections had been held, noted the way in which the incumbent had conceded victory to the opposition.

The Secretary-General said Malawi's achievement was a source of encouragement for Africa and beyond, and merited the full support of the international community. He also expressed satisfaction at the United Nations contribution to the country's transition.

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As of 15 May, Member States owed the United Nations a total of $2.98 billion, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Of that amount, $990 million was for assessments for the regular budget and $1.99 billion was for peace-keeping operations.

The United States -- the largest debtor -- owed almost $300 million to the regular budget, and more than $550 million to the peace-keeping budget, for the current year; it owed more than $230 million and $100 million respectively for prior years. Japan and the Russian Federation had regular budget contributions outstanding for the current year, but not for previous years. However, the Russian Federation owed almost $580 million in total peace-keeping contributions.

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The Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, Samir Sanbar, today said that the Department of Public Information (DPI) would challenge the "good news is no news" theory by making development issues more attrative to the media. He told the Committee on Information that much of the work of the United Nations was development-related, but the media often focused on the political arena. He added that the DPI would highlight the issues raised in the Secretary-General's forthcoming report "an agenda for development".

Stressing the need for an integrated information strategy, Mr. Sanbar said a solid programme to inform public opinion on peace-keeping operations -- particularly in the countries hosting them -- would counter unrealistic expectations and promote cooperation in the long run.

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The Second United Nations Conference on Disarmament will be held in Hiroshima, Japan, from 24 to 27 May, under the general theme, "Transparency in Armaments, Regional Dialogue and Disarmament." The Conference is being convened by the United Nations Centre for Disarmament Affairs, in close cooperation with the Government of Japan and the City of Hiroshima. It will be opened by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Marrack Goulding, and a high-level representative of the Japanese Government.

The Conference will review pressing disarmament and security issues and examine efforts to promote regional dialogue, particularly in South and North-East Asia. Some 70 government officials, parliamentary representatives, academics and members of the media will attend the Conference in their personal capacities.

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